

Partnering With Tribes to Conserve Natural Resources in Washington

Financial Assistance to Tribes by Program in Fiscal Year 2015

Tribe	Financial Assistance
Colville (CSP)	\$62,882
Colville (EQIP)	\$281,198
Colville (RCPP)	\$2,000,000
Quileute (EQIP)	\$47,551
Quinault (EQIP)	\$147,741.00
Suquamish (EQIP)	\$11,176
Yakama (EQIP)	\$525,393
Yakama (RCPP)	\$4,600,000
Grand Total (All Programs)	\$7,675,941

Washington Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (WATCAC)

The Washington Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (WATCAC) is comprised of representatives from participating tribes and members of NRCS State Leadership. WATCAC serves in an advisory role to NRCS regarding programs, practice standards and tribal resource priorities.

All tribes are welcome to participate in the monthly WATCAC meetings/teleconferences. Tribes who submit resolutions declaring participation in and appointing representatives to the WATCAC have voting privileges. If your tribe is considering participation and/or a resolution, please contact your NRCS tribal liaison.

For More Information Washington NRCS

Robin Slate, Tribal Liaison
robin.slate@wa.usda.gov

www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov/partnerships/tribes



The Qwuloolt estuary hydrology restored by breaching a century old levee. WRP easement land in the foreground.

Qwuloolt Estuary Restoration: Over 20 Years in the Making

For nearly two decades, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service has been working with partners and the Tulalip Tribes near Marysville, Wash to restore to the Qwuloolt Estuary to its natural hydrology. But in late August 2015, at sun up, this longstanding goal was finally achieved.

According to the Tulalip Tribes, "the goal of the Qwuloolt Project is to restore the historic and natural processes of the river and tides, which will eventually provide for a functional estuarine wetland that connects to the broader Snohomish Estuary."

NRCS' involvement with the Qwuloolt Restoration Project dates all the way back to 1996, when the agency acquired an easement of 258 acres through the former Wetlands Reserve Program, now the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

Later, the Tulalip Tribes purchased the land and began the process of restoration planning, calling upon the support of many other partners, some of whom include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Army Corps of Engineers, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the City of Marysville, Puget Sound Partnership, and Washington Departments of Ecology and Fish & Wildlife.

NRCS'-WA on-the-ground work with the estuary began in 2005 when the agency provided financial and technical assistance for the removal of blackberry bushes, native tree planting, fence removal, ditch filling, and drain tile plugging on the easement.

Then, in 2013, NRCS-WA funded interior restoration work to prepare for the Snohomish river dike for breaching by the Army Corps of Engineers. This funding included habitat mounds and channel excavation, fish passage barrier removal, tide gate decommissioning and contributing to the construction of a setback levee to protect the City of Marysville's waste water treatment plant.

The culmination of restoration work by NRCS and many other partners was the breaching of the levee along the Ebey Slough under the direction of the US Army Corps of Engineers on August 28, 2015. State Conservationist, Roylene Rides at the Door was among the special guests invited to the dedication and salmon bake which took place several days after the breaching of the levee.



The Qwuloolt estuary where the Snohomish River meets Puget Sound – interior microtopography work being completed before levee breaching.

“The breach of the levee was a critical moment in the history of this restoration project,” said State Conservationist, Roylene Rides at the Door. “I was honored to be a part of the culmination of a project that NRCS and partners have been working towards for so long,” said Rides at the Door.

Over the following days the breach area was slowly expanded by the contractor and by the natural tidal flows moving in and out of the newly re-activated estuary. The levee breach is restoring the land to the salt marsh it had been prior to the levees that were built over a century ago. The purpose of the original WRP easement has finally been achieved. Over time, mud flats, tidal channels, pools and connections to salmon spawning streams will form, and critical salmon population will be reintroduced to the area, naturally.

NRCS has committed over \$802,000 in financial assistance to the estuary restoration and hundreds of hours of technical assistance from NRCS biologists, foresters, engineers, technicians, and contracting and program specialists.

Weaverling Spit Restoration Project–Samish Indian Nation

Weaverling Spit is now a conservation area set-aside for the Tribe, and has been an important site over the centuries for the Samish as evidenced in both tribal history and archaeology. NRCS is happy to have played a part in helping them to restore its native vegetation. Prior to NRCS involvement, the Tribe removed almost 27 tons of English ivy, as well as derelict buildings, including a former dance hall and several cabins.

In 2012, the Samish applied for an EQIP grant to further the restoration, signing a contract that included more invasive species control as well as planting and care of native trees and shrubs. The Spit is the driest of western Washington forest sites: the Douglas-fir–Pacific madrone ecological site, so appropriate shrub species such as oceanspray, Cascade Oregongrape, woodland strawberry and kinnikinnick were planted along with lodgepole pine, Douglas-fir and Pacific madrone. The Tribe reports that the biodiversity of the Spit has already improved, with evidence of deer, otter and coyote use as well as improved forage fish and migratory bird habitat. Perhaps best of all of these is an active bald eagle nest on the restoration site.

Yakama Nation Closed Area Soil Survey

The Yakama Nation is located in eastern Washington State and covers an area of approximately 1.3 million acres, of which about 1.1 million acres is the Yakama Nation Closed Area soil survey. The closed area soil survey gets its name from the fact that most of the land in federal trust within the soil survey boundary has been set aside from the development of permanent structures by the Yakama Nation Tribal government and reserved for exclusive use by the Yakama people. It covers Major Land Resource Areas (MLRAs) 3, 6, 7, and 8, from the top of Mount Adams to approximately a mile southwest of Mabton, Washington. It has great diversity in landforms and geology. Elevation ranges from approximately 12,200 to 1,500 feet with precipitation ranging from approximately 100 to 7 inches.

The Yakama Nation, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and NRCS cooperated to gather the completed field collection data, complete quality control and assurance of field data, conduct workload for project completion, final correlation and SSURGO certification of soil survey project, which was achieved fall of 2014.

During the process of the project we were able to create over 40 new soil series and this created an opportunity to use the Yakama language to develop names for the soil series. As stated by the DNR Deputy Director, Yakama Nation, “Like the link between soil and plants, there is a link between our Yakama natural resources and the Yakama language. I believe a respect for, and the use of, the Yakama language results in improved natural and cultural resource management.” So when you see a soil names like Xasya, Tiicham, Nchitaak or Wakamuticham, make sure to look in the ‘Series Proposed’ section of the Official Series Description because you will find information about the meaning of the Yakama word.

The project is not yet fully completed, with the manuscript projected to be completed by fiscal year 2016, depending on agency priorities and workloads. To obtain soil survey information for the Yakama Nation Closed Area project you can contact the Yakama Nation natural resource department.

Team USDA Holds Breakout Session at ATNI

Several agencies within the US Department of Agriculture held a breakout session at the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians annual conference in Spokane, WA on September 16, 2015.

Representatives from six USDA agencies based in Washington State were present at the session. Attendees were interested in help that the agencies could provide for wildfire recovery. Agencies represented included WSU Extension, National Ag Statistics Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, Risk Management Agency, and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.